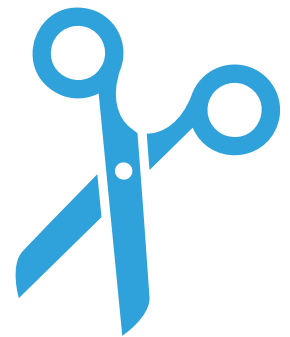




Community Activity: Getting a Haircut



OBJECTIVE

Getting a haircut provides an excellent opportunity to use an AAC device in the community! There are numerous communication moments throughout the experience—before, during, and after the haircut. Using AAC during this familiar activity gives users more control over their appearance and increases their confidence when expressing preferences about themselves.

BEFORE THE HAIRCUT



Communication Opportunity

Discussing haircut style and preferences.

Communication Facilitation

Before the appointment, engage your AAC user in conversations about how they want their hair styled. Use basic concepts to describe hair options, such as “short,” “long,” “more,” or “less.” Talk about the color of their hair and compare it to your own or others’. You can use favorite characters as inspiration—discuss who they might want to look like or show pictures and allow them to respond with “yes” or “no.”



Using the AAC device for these discussions empowers the user to have greater control over their appearance. For individuals who may feel anxious about haircuts, begin discussing the experience several days in advance so they have time to mentally prepare. Support them in selecting sensory or comfort items they might want to bring along, such as a squishy toy or noise-canceling headphones.

ARRIVING AT THE APPOINTMENT



Communication Opportunity

Greeting staff and checking in.

Communication Facilitation

If age-appropriate, encourage your AAC user to greet the receptionist and state their name to check in for the haircut. Practice this interaction before entering the building. Using the speech bar to prepare a message allows your user to hit the speak button when needed. They can communicate what time their appointment is scheduled for or which stylist they're seeing.



If your AAC user isn't ready to engage directly with unfamiliar people, model on the device yourself during check-in to demonstrate its use and increase their comfort with new communication partners.

IN THE WAITING ROOM



Communication Opportunity

Engaging with media and managing pre-haircut feelings.

Communication Facilitation

Barbershops and salons typically have magazines or videos playing while you are waiting. Use this time meaningfully by looking through magazines together and labeling what you see. Point out different hair colors or styles and ask if your AAC user likes them using yes/no questions or rating scales. If there's a TV available, watch together and label what you see on screen.



This is also an excellent time to check in about feelings—ask your user how they're feeling about the upcoming haircut and validate any nervousness or excitement they express.



DURING THE HAIRCUT



Communication Opportunity

Communicating preferences and providing feedback.

Communication Facilitation

Support your AAC user in telling the hairstylist how they want their haircut. It's helpful to inform the stylist in advance that your user communicates with AAC and may need additional time to make selections. Patience is essential for successful communication!



Ensure appropriate vocabulary is programmed on the device beforehand, including hair-specific terms, feeling words, and directional concepts. The user can select how many inches they want cut or indicate specific style preferences. Throughout the haircut, encourage them to provide feedback using phrases like “more+short+please,” “like+it,” or “stop+please” if they need a break.

LEAVING THE APPOINTMENT



Communication Opportunity

Expressing gratitude, sharing opinions, and planning next steps.

Communication Facilitation

After the appointment concludes, encourage your AAC user to thank the hairstylist using their device. They can participate in scheduling another appointment if needed. While looking in the mirror, ask them if they like their new hairstyle and how they feel about it.



Use first-then language as you prepare to leave (e.g., “first+pay, then+lunch”). When exiting the shop, use the device to select and announce where you're going next! Take a photo of their new haircut to celebrate the experience and refer back to it during future haircut conversations.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS



- ✔ Program haircut-specific vocabulary on the device before the appointment.
- ✔ Call ahead to find a patient, accommodating stylist willing to work with AAC users.
- ✔ Consider bringing visual supports or social stories about haircuts.
- ✔ Schedule appointments during quieter times if sensory sensitivities are a concern.
- ✔ Celebrate successful communication during the experience, regardless of how the haircut turns out!